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What Friends Say

Nixon in Seclusion — 'Tired, Fatalistic'

San Clemente

Richard M. Nixon, in virtual seclusion since resigning the presidency, is described by friends who have seen him recently as "tired, fatalistic and preoccupied with his legal problems."

One long-time friend said Mr. Nixon is taking his fall from power pretty hard, but seemed to him to be "OK physically and mentally." Another political friend and associate, who visited Mr. Nixon at San Clemente a few days ago, discounted rumors that the former president is suffering from major emotional problems.

"There is nothing to the report that he has been acting in an errant or unusual way," he said.

Because the embattled former president has chosen to become a recluse behind his white-walled estate in San Clemente, recurrent rumors and reports have arisen in regard to his physical and mental well-being.

Efforts to contact Mr. Nixon's associates have been largely unsuccessful and most of those who have been closest to him during his 23-year political career are reluctant to talk about the former President. Those who do have asked not to be identified.

Herbert G. Klein, former communications director for Mr. Nixon and now an executive with Metromedia, Inc., in Los Angeles, said yesterday that "everyone I've talked to says that Mr. Nixon is on top of things and that he is assessing his problems realistically." Others who have talked to former press secretary Ron Ziegler quote him as saying that Mr. Nixon is coming along fine.

On [illegible] occasions

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since Mr. Nixon returned to California August 9, as far as is known, has he ventured from San Clemente — once for a drive south and once for a picnic on a beach in Ventura. Both trips were soon after his departure from the White House.

Since that time he has remained on the estate he bought in 1969, six months after he took office as President.

Accompanying him from Washington, and serving as aides, have been Ziegler, former appointments secretary Stephen Bull; a military aide, Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Jack Brennan, and a handful of secretaries and other assistants.

According to friends, Mr. Nixon is spending his tim working on two basic problems — his personal financial situation and the legal problems confronting him.

One friend estimated the former President spends $10,000 a month for mortgage payments, staff salaries and legal expenses, not counting personal living expenses.

"He has a lot of personal decisions to make — about what real estate properties to keep and other such matters," another friend said.

Also, it has been reported that a number of employment offers have been made to Mr. Nixon, but that he has decided not to practice law.

One report being circulated in Washington indicates that Mr. Nixon will be engaged as a contributing editor to Readers Digest at a salary in excess of $100,000 a year.

In addition, it is rumored that Mr. Nixon will sell his memoirs, collecting a multi-million dollar advance to help him through his current financial difficulties.

But efforts to obtain confirmation or denial of any of these reports or to gain contact at all with the person still close to the former President, have been mostly fruitless.

Secretaries answering Ziegler's phone report either that "This is not a press office," or that Ziegler is "in a meeting and will be tied up most of the day."

Ziegler stayed at the Surf and Sand Hotel in Laguna Beach when he first returned to California with Mr. Nixon, but since then has rented a house close to Mr. Nixon's home.

A young woman who answered the phone at the rented house offered a curt, "You have the wrong number."

Apparently Mr. Nixon works daily in an office in the house rather than spending his time at the government compound on the adjacent Coast Guard base.

Despite reports of fatigue and mental exhaustion, Mr. Nixon is said by close friends to maintain a schedule of physical exercise, with daily dips in the pool at his home and occasional strolls on the beach.

But there are some contradictions concerning his condition.

One friend says it is his feeling that Mr. Nixon knows what happened to him, but can't figure out why.

One explanation given for his decision to disappear from public view is that he hasn't yet made up his mind what to say about matters, particularly in view of legal complications facing him, and that he does not want to engage in small talk with friends or discuss Watergate or his resignation.

A friend who visited Mr. Nixon for an hour last week said there is no question that he is still trying to figure out what happened, and that he is "worried about the legal problems and his future."

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